

Week Ending Friday, May 9, 1997

Interview With the San Antonio Express News, the Los Angeles Times, and the Dallas Morning News
May 1, 1997

The President. Hello?

Elizabeth Shogren. Mr. President, good morning. This is Elizabeth Shogren with the L.A. Times.

The President. Hi, Elizabeth.

Ms. Shogren. How's it going?

The President. Fine, thank you.

Mexico-U.S. Antidrug Efforts

Ms. Shogren. I spoke with Senator Feinstein a couple minutes ago, and she mentioned to me some particular evidence of progress on drug issues that she'd like to see from your trip—in particular, indications from the Mexicans that they're going ahead with money-laundering law and will give DEA agents permission to carry sidearms. I wondered if you are going to press for measurable indications from Mexico of progress on the drug issues or if you have some other strategy?

The President. Well, first of all, as you know because it's reported in the press today, the Mexicans have announced significant reorganization of their antidrug effort, which I think is very encouraging. And they have cooperated with us in a number of ways. As you know, we do have DEA agents assigned to our Embassy in Mexico City in a liaison capacity. We are committed, both of us, to increasing our law enforcement, counter-drug cooperation, and we're committed to the safety of our law enforcement personnel, and we're working with the Government of Mexico to make sure we can assure their security. So I feel that we will be able to resolve that.

But our participation in task forces, in terms of being detailed to Mexico, will have to require some resolution of this safety issue, but we're working on it. They have

done—in almost every other area, they have continued to cooperate with us and have produced a lot of results, and money laundering is the next thing we're working on.

But I believe you'd have to say that Zedillo's government has worked with us. Now, we know what the problem is in a lot of these countries that are dealing with poor people, often living in reasonably remote areas and with unlimited amounts of money to try to corrupt local officials. But I believe that Zedillo and his team are committed to trying to work with us, not because they want to work with us any more than they want to clean up Mexico and have Mexico be a good place for the people who live there.

We both have a huge stake in this anti-drug effort. Obviously, for us, we're trying to keep drugs from being imported into the United States; for them, they're trying to keep the narcotraffickers from undermining the integrity of their democracy and the long-term success and stability of their society.

So I'm—that's why I've strongly supported continuing their certification status. I think they want to work with us, and we're going to keep doing it.

Kathy Lewis. Mr. President, this is Kathy Lewis [Dallas Morning News].

The President. Hi, Kathy.

Ms. Lewis. Hi. There was a report this weekend that the U.S. has quietly been debating proposals to impose economic penalties against Mexican drug traffickers. How seriously are you considering freezing U.S. assets and blocking traffickers' access to their bank accounts? And have you made a decision?

The President. Well, we work on that all the time. And if we can identify people whose assets—who are narcotraffickers and whose assets we can legally freeze, we would do that without hesitation. We have—I'm very encouraged that we have increased our capacity to identify, for example, Colombian companies that are essentially fronts for drug

money and are able to freeze their assets and limit their activities in the United States. So we would do that for companies from anywhere, and we're working on it all that time.

Mexico-U.S. Trade

Gary Martin. Mr. President, this is Gary Martin with the San Antonio Express News.

The President. Hi, Gary.

Mr. Martin. Hi. Your administration has been criticized in Texas, by Texas officials, for banning organized labor and delaying the implementation of NAFTA accords that would allow Mexican and U.S. truckers to haul cargo into border States. What's being done to resolve that issue? And will we see an announcement lifting the ban made in Mexico City?

The President. Well, we're working hard on that. But let me just say, we think there are some legitimate questions which we raised. And we believe that we're committed and duty bound to allow Mexican motor carriers and drivers to operate in the United States if they are safe. And we're trying to identify steps that we can agree upon between the United States and Mexico to jointly take to benefit the motor carriers and the customers and enhance public safety and security at the same time.

Our trade—U.S.-Mexico trade came to \$130 billion in 1996. If you have a relationship this broad, there is going to be some areas of disagreement, just like we have continuing areas of disagreement with our neighbor to the north, Canada. But that represents a very small portion of our bilateral commerce. And we have to try to resolve it.

We've had a couple of other disagreements. We're trying to work through these things. But they're going to—we knew from the beginning that there would be some areas of disagreement, that no comprehensive agreement like this is perfect. But I think it's clearly been best for both Mexico and the United States.

Certification Process and Antidrug Efforts

Ms. Shogren. Mr. President, this is Elizabeth Shogren again. Given that the certification process, as it stands now, has given you and the Congress and the Mexican peo-

ple so much trouble each time it comes up—it's a huge hassle—do you have any plans to change that process? And will you speak about these plans with President Zedillo or others in Mexico?

The President. Well, I don't expect that we will discuss that since that decision is behind us now, assuming we continue our cooperation here. But I believe that the question of whether this whole certification system is the best way of dealing with the fight against drugs and securing cooperation is a legitimate question. There's a lot of debate about it in the Congress now. Congressman Lee Hamilton made a public statement about it just a couple of days ago. I know that the Speaker and others have voiced their questions about it. And what I have tried to do here is to set in motion a little bipartisan discussion in the Congress about it, try to evaluate whether we should keep the system we have and, if we change it, what we put in its place, what they believe the best alternatives are.

It's the sort of thing that it's easy to demagog if you seek to change it, but if it's not working, we at least ought to—or if there's serious reason to doubt whether it's the most effective way to fight drugs, then we ought to have an honest evaluation of it. I know General McCaffrey has some questions about it. So what I've asked our people to do is to try to get knowledgeable people in the Congress together on both sides and really take a hard look at this and make a recommendation to us and see if we can't make a bipartisan decision here and move forward with that.

You don't want to do something which appears on the surface to be tough but actually undermines the ultimate objective. The ultimate objective is to reduce the volume of drugs coming into the United States.

Ms. Shogren. Right.

The President. So, yes, we're looking at it.

Mexico-U.S. Relations

Ms. Lewis. Mr. President, U.S.-Mexico relations are always delicate, but you're traveling there at a particularly sensitive time because of drugs and immigration and the concern about it on both sides. Will you be able

to address that with both the people of Mexico and those in the United States having their concerns eased? And also, do you feel the trust has been recovered that was lost since the decertification debate and the arrest of Mexico's drug czar?

The President. Well, first of all, I think we ought to see this in the larger context. I mean, if you compare our relationship with Mexico today, for example, with several years ago, there's no question that we're stronger today, that when NAFTA was passed it brought us closer together commercially, that we were growing closer together anyway, that the fact that we came to Mexico's aid when the economy was teetering and threatening to destabilize the economies of many other Latin American countries, and that, in turn, they paid their loan back to us ahead of schedule and with \$500 million profit in interest. I think those things ought to be seen as enormous positives, bespeaking a new partnership. They were also—Mexico is a very active part of the Summit of the Americas, and we know that a lot of our common future is tied up with Mexico.

Secondly, with regard to immigration, keep in mind that the United States is now the fifth largest Hispanic nation in the world, with 22 million legal residents. And obviously, they're from many, many different countries, but the largest source is Mexico.

So I think that we have a positive trend here toward economic reform in Mexico, toward political reform with a third of Mexico's people living, at the State and local level, under opposition party leaders to the governing party, freely elected in free elections. And now I think there's a serious effort being made to deal with the drug issues.

So the framework, I think, is quite positive, especially if you look to the years ahead. Now, what we have to do is just to continue to work on our economic relationship, continue to work on the narcotrafficking. And what I think for our part in the United States we have to do is to make—on the immigration issue, I think it is absolutely imperative that the provisions that were tacked onto the welfare bill—they're not part of the welfare reform bill, they were tacked onto the welfare reform bill—hostile to legal immigrants already living in this country—be changed.

And I think it's important for us to be sensitive in the way that we implement the new law dealing with illegal immigration. But after all, what that law requires us to do, it seems to me, is eminently sensible. It gives us the tools to strengthen border control, to toughen worksite enforcement, and to increase the removal of criminal aliens and others who are deportable and come in contact with the Government in some way.

I think that this is not an anti-immigrant country. We let in 960,000 immigrants legally last year. But we do have to do our very best to see that any immigrant who comes into this country, comes in legally. And if there are no consequences to coming in illegally, it will be impossible to do that.

So we have to do this in a humane and decent way. We have to continue to show that we're a nation of laws. We have to respect human rights and not have any kind of discriminatory treatment or massive deportations. But this new law will give us tools we need to try to increase the integrity of our immigration system so that we can continue to maintain support for legal immigration but be more effective in deterring illegal immigration.

Murderer of DEA Agent

Mr. Martin. Mr. President, what do you plan to say to President Zedillo about the Mexican judicial system's decision to vacate a killer's conviction for the slaying of DEA agent Enrique Camarena, which many Americans believe smacks of official corruption itself?

The President. Well, it's my understanding that he's seeking to use a procedure that's similar to our habeas corpus procedure to appeal the conviction. And furthermore, it's my understanding that even if he were to win his appeal, he'll still be subject to 35 more years in jail in Mexico.

In any case, we have a standing immediate-arrest request in Mexico for the purpose of extraditing him to the United States as soon as he's released from confinement in Mexico for whatever reasons. So, if he's going to serve 35 more years in jail, that's one thing. If for some reason we're wrong about our understanding of the facts and a court would release him, we would expect

his immediate extradition to the United States so that he could be prosecuted here.

Deputy Press Secretary Mary Ellen Glynn. OK, thanks everyone.

Mr. Martin. Thank you.

Ms. Shogren. Thank you, Mr. President.

Ms. Lewis. Thank you.

The President. Goodbye. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 11:22 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks Announcing the Budget Agreement and an Exchange With Reporters in Baltimore, Maryland

May 2, 1997

The President. For more than 4 years now, I have worked hard to pursue a strategy that would keep our economy growing and creating opportunity for the American people, giving people a chance to be rewarded for their labors, and also imposing upon ourselves the discipline necessary to prepare for the future and to relieve ourselves of a lot of the problems that had been accumulated over the last several years, especially the deficit.

Now, we have reached agreement, in broad but fairly specific terms that I am satisfied will do that, with the Republican leaders today that would balance the budget by 2002, continue to increase our investment in education, in science and technology and medical research, require us to continue to show great discipline in other areas and to continue to downsize some Government operations. It would invest in doing what I think is important, to be sure that we can move people from welfare to work who are going to be required to go to work. It would expand coverage to millions of children who presently do not have health insurance. It would restore cuts to benefits for legal immigrants who are in this country who have sustained injuries and other problems for which they would otherwise be eligible for benefits. It will extend the life of Medicare and secure the integrity of the Medicaid program be-

tween now and 2002. It will be the first balanced budget in three decades.

It's a good thing that it's coming today, when we learned that our employment rate had dropped to 4.9 percent for the first time in 24 years. We know that we have the biggest decline in inequality in our work force since the 1960's, and we've seen our economy produce the largest number of new jobs since 1993 ever produced in a 4-year period. That happened because a lot of the people standing up here with me right now had the courage to vote for a plan to bring the deficit down in 1993 and get interest rates down and investments up.

This agreement will help us to finish the job. I have spoken several times over the last several days with Senator Lott and with Speaker Gingrich. I want to thank them personally for negotiating with me openly, candidly, and I'm convinced, in complete good faith.

I have also had occasion to speak with the representatives of the Democratic caucus, obviously, who were in this budget negotiation, Senator Lautenberg for the Democrats and Congressman John Spratt from South Carolina, and the Republicans who were represented by their chairs, Senator Domenici and Congressman Kasich. I want to thank them all. I want to thank Senator Domenici and Congressman Kasich; they worked very hard. And we know there are significant differences between us in how we look at what is the best way to balance the budget, and they tried to bridge these gaps. Congressman Spratt and Senator Lautenberg did as well, and I'm very proud of all four of them. They served America well. They put the interests of the country first in trying to work through to get us as close as we are today. And so I appreciate that very much.

Now, let me say again—let me give you just some of the details very quickly. The plan will protect Medicare, extending the life of the Trust Fund for a decade, extending new benefits for annual mammograms and diabetes screening. Home health will be shifted from Part A to Part B, and there will be a modest premium for home health services being phased in at one dollar per month, a year.